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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ISLAMABAD 004789

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SUBJECT: BHUTTO SAYS SHE MUST PROTEST STATE OF EMERGENCY

REF: ISLAMABAD 4786 ISLAMABAD 4785 ISLAMABAD 4776 AND
PREVIOUS

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson, for reasons 1.4 (b)(d)

¶1. (C) Summary. Pakistan People's Party leader Benazir Bhutto told Ambassador Novmeber 7 that "I am ready to continue with the roadmap with Musharraf" but first he has to honor his commitments to schedule elections and announce his resignation from the Army. Without this, Musharraf had left her no choice but to take PPP to the streets. She plans to continue with a proposed November 9 rally in Rawalpindi and said that if Musharraf did not announce elections and remove the uniform, she would organized a long march November 13 from Lahore to Islamabad.

¶2. (C) Comment: The threat of mass PPP participation in demonstrations is Bhutto's best card, but she is playing a dangerous game that could trigger an even stronger counter-reaction from Musharraf. As we have reported, Bhutto's ability to put people into the streets is unique. We can foresee a plausible scenario in which the Army, rather than the police, might have to take action to quell unrest. At this point, it is not clear if the Army would support such a request. It would depend on the size and scope of the demonstrations. End Summary.

¶3. (C) Ambassador met November 7 with Pakistan People's Party leader Benazir Bhutto at her Islamabad home. This is Bhutto's first visit to Islamabad since her self-imposed exile in 1999. Bhutto reported that the Ministry of Interior had finally called November 6 for eye witness statements from two of her supporters about the October bomb blast at her welcome rally in Karachi. She went into some detail explaining several theories about who was responsible for the bombing and how it was carried out. DCM briefed her on his November 7 meetings with Interior Minister Sherpao and presidential advisor Tariq Aziz; both promised to provide Bhutto with briefings on the GOP investigation into the bombing.

¶4. (C) Bhutto said she was ready to continue the "roadmap" on her agreement with Musharraf. She did not want to send her people into the streets to protest the state of emergency and suspension of the constitution, but Musharraf is leaving her no other option. During a meeting with the PPP's Amin Fahim and Rehman Malik, Tariq Aziz asked that the PPP not join the street demonstrations, but Musharraf is offering nothing in return. He has not yet agreed to promises made in July to reconstitute the Election Commission, enact

anti-fraud electoral reforms and remove mayors who unduly influence the election process. Musharraf invited her back from Dubai for talks on the roadmap and then suddenly imposed the state of emergency. "I was prepared to meet with him but now I cannot do it. He must fulfill his promises first."

15. (C) Ambassador expressed concern about Bhutto's safety and that of her supporters if she proceeds with the proposed rally in Rawalpindi on November 9. (Note: UK High Commissioner delivered the same message.) Bhutto replied that "I have to go forward because it is announced and because I have pledged to fight the state of emergency." Otherwise, she said, "I will be considered as being in cahoots with Musharraf." If Musharraf does not fulfill his commitments by November 9, she plans a November 13 long march from Lahore to Islamabad.

15. (C) On her plans to organize other opposition parties, Bhutto said that she could, at least temporarily, work with the religious parties and the ANP. They could united on a single goal of restoring the constitution but she would be wary of working with the religious parties in the long term. (Septel will report on meetings the PPP held November 7 with the Alliance for the Restoration of Democracy group, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz, the Jamaat-e-Islami and the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam parties.)

16. (C) Bhutto thanked the U.S. and the international community and asked that the USG keep up the pressure to convince Musharraf to announce he would hold elections on schedule and retire as Chief of Army Staff. Ambassador assured her that we had and would continue efforts to convince Musharraf on both points. We had been very clear in

ISLAMABAD 00004789 002 OF 002

our messages to date and would continue to make the case because elections and a transition to civilian rule were the only way out for Pakistan. Bhutto confirmed that so far, Musharraf continues to be vague about those commitments. She is concerned that he will delay elections; "even a delay of five days" would be dangerous because it will lead to even more delays.

17. (C) Bhutto said that she has not raised the National Reconciliation Ordinance with Musharraf, because she does not want him to think that she is concerned only with the cases against her.

18. (C) Expressing alarm at the judges being chosen for the reconstituted Supreme Court and provincial high courts, Bhutto said that all three judges who ordered the re-opening of the Red Mosque under the direction of Maulana Aziz had been returned to the bench. Another judge appointed in Sindh had murder charges pending against him. How, she said, can we restore democracy when the judiciary is in the hands of extremists and criminals? Ambassador noted that she had just met with the Attorney General (septel), who confirmed in fact that three of the judges who supported the reinstatement of Maulana Aziz were being reinstated.

19. (C) Bhutto voiced growing concern that militant extremists were taking over district after district in the settled areas along the Federally Administered Tribal Area and in Afghanistan. She said she had talked to the Afghan Foreign Minister and was writing to President Karzai because "they know the tribes along the border that we can work with." She suggested that attacks on entire villages just alienated the population; a more targeted approach relying on villagers who can identify which of their neighbors are causing problems would be more effective.

10. (C) She also mentioned that both Senator Chris Dodd and Congresswoman Sheila Jackson-Lee had called Bhutto November 17. Bhutto was pleased that Senator Conrad has expressed interest in PPP attorney Aitzaz Ahsan's case. DCM briefed her on assurances made by MOI Sherpao and Tariq Aziz that

Ahsan was being well treated in prison, was receiving his medication, and could soon meet with family members.

¶11. (C) Comment: Bhutto appeared relaxed and calm, despite the violent clash just an hour and half before between PPP parliamentarians and police outside PPP headquarters in Islamabad. She is carefully playing her primary card--the threat of PPP participation in street demonstrations--with Musharraf in the hopes it will pressure him to announce a date certain for elections. This is a dangerous game that could trigger serious popular unrest and an even stronger reaction from Musharraf. As we have reported, Bhutto is the one politician with the ability to mobilize large numbers of people. We can foresee a plausible scenario where the Army, rather than the police, would be called in to quell unrest. If that happens, it is not clear if the Army would agree to act as policeman or would repeat Pakistani history by turning on Musharraf. Much would depend on the size and scope of the demonstrations.

PATTERSON